
Iowa Local Food and Farm Program

Annual Report to the Iowa Legislature

June 2016



About This Report

This is the 2016 report of the Local Food and Farm Program to the Iowa Legislature, covering activities from July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2016. This program was established in August 2011 as part of the Local Food and Farm Initiative. It will empower farmers and food entrepreneurs to provide for strong local food economies that promote self-sufficiency and job growth in the agricultural sector and allied sectors of the economy. The goals of this program are to:

- Promote the expansion of the production of local foods, including the production, processing, distribution and marketing of Iowa products.
- Increase consumer and institutional spending on Iowa-produced and marketed foods.
- Increase the profitability of farmers and businesses engaged in enterprises related to producing, processing, distributing and marketing local food.
- Increase the number of jobs in this state's farm and business economies associated with producing, processing, distributing and marketing local food.

The program is a collaborative effort among the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, ISU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

For more information, contact:

- Craig Chase, Coordinator, Local Food and Farm Program
(515) 294-1854, cchase@iastate.edu
- Lynn Heuss, Assistant Coordinator, Local Food and Farm Program
(515) 201-9405, leheuss@iastate.edu
- Leigh Adcock, Communications Specialist, ISU Local Foods Program
laadcock@iastate.edu
- Carrie Chennault, Graduate Research Assistant, ISU Local Foods Program
carriemc@iastate.edu
- Arlene Enderton, Program Assistant, ISU Local Foods Program
Arlene@iastate.edu
- Courtney Long, Design Fellow, ISU Local Foods Program
Court7@iastate.edu
- Caitlin Szymanski, Program Coordinator, ISU Local Foods Program
Szy@iastate.edu
- Alice Topaloff, Program Assistant, ISU Local Foods Program
topaloff@iastate.edu

Cover photos courtesy of Hannah M. Fisher, ISU Local Foods Program intern, hmfisher@iastate.edu. Center photo: At Salama Greenhouse and Floral near Boone, Mike Salama grows tomatoes in the greenhouse using a hydroponic system. Photos upper left and lower right: workers at FarmTable Procurement and Delivery of Harlan pack vegetables for drop-off at Omaha restaurants.

Contents

About This Report.....	2
Executive Summary	4
Background and Context	5
Local Foods in Iowa	5
Local Food and Farm Initiative	7
Program Areas.....	8
1. Beginning Farmers	8
Overview of 07/2015 – 06/2016	8
Next Steps.....	9
2. Economic Development	10
Overview of 07/2015 – 06/2016	10
Next Steps.....	13
3. Community Development.....	14
Overview of 07/2015 – 06/2016	14
Next Steps.....	18
4. Evaluation.....	20
Overview of 07/2015 – 06/2016	20
Next Steps.....	20
5. Local Foods Publications Released between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016	21
Program Team	22
Program Council	24
References.....	25

Executive Summary

A robust local and regional food system:

- Provides opportunities for beginning farmers to start up with lower capital investment (smaller equipment and fewer acres are needed),
- Promotes strong conservation practices that improve food security and resilience,
- Helps develop new markets and economic opportunities, and
- Provides opportunities for children to connect to their food sources, promoting healthy eating habits.

The legislative funds from the Local Food and Farm Initiative (LFFI) support these opportunities, and allow Iowans to participate in the creation of a vibrant and sustainable local food economy. Projects and initiatives fall into the following four priority areas:

Priority # 1: Beginning farmers. According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture, 18 percent of Iowa farmers are more than 65 years old, and only 4 percent are under 35 years old. Who will farm Iowa's land in the future? The Local Food and Farm Initiative has leveraged support for programs and resources geared toward beginning farmer training (refugee incubator farm, resource guide for beginning farmers, prison farm training program, and more).

Priority #2: Economic impact. In a February 2015 study of food hubs conducted by the Iowa State University Local Foods Program evaluation team, Iowa local food leaders who were surveyed identified 31 new and emerging food hubs or centers of food hub-related activity in Iowa. LFFI funds supported the development of tools to enhance farmer profitability, research on food hub financial viability, and consumer outreach.

Priority #3: Community development. Many participants are facilitating food systems change, including producers, farm laborers, nonprofits and their employees and volunteers, community activists, ISU Extension and Outreach staff, and more. The LFFI continues to support the facilitation of communities of practice such as the Regional Food Systems Working Group and Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group, and assists communities in building relationships and planning sustainable local food systems.

Priority #4: Evaluation. Systematically gathering information on the context, processes, and outcomes of local food system work informs the decisions and actions of partners who can then more effectively support the food systems. This effort includes communicating the importance of relevant evaluation, and assisting groups in doing so.

Background and Context

Local Foods in Iowa

Iowa's economy has relied on agriculture for most of its history. As demand for local food rises statewide, an increasing number of Iowans (producers, processors, food system practitioners, etc.) are engaging in providing consumers with more local food products. The national average for direct-to-consumer sales of food increased from \$116,733 to \$144,530 per farm between 2002 and 2012.ⁱ A statewide economic impact study of local food sales showed that the same group of food buyers spent \$1.5 million more in 2014 than in 2013.ⁱⁱ In 2013, a sampling of Iowa farmers reported that they employed 110 people (34.1 of them in FTE jobs) for every \$1 million in sales.ⁱⁱ

Iowans spend more than \$8 billion on food each year, of which it is estimated that only 14 percent is grown within the state.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, Iowa has many fewer acres devoted to growing vegetables and fruit than the national average. Research by Iowa State University economist David Swenson concluded that Iowa devotes 83 percent fewer acres to vegetable production than the national average. Swenson also found that Iowa has 94 percent fewer acres devoted to the production of (non-citrus) fruit. As a result, most fresh fruits and vegetables consumed by Iowans are imported from other states and countries.ⁱⁱⁱ Swenson's research indicates that increased production of fruit and vegetables coupled with a decrease in food imports could result in a corresponding increase in jobs and income for many Iowans.

Despite the rise in local foods activities, much work remains to be done to capture the economic benefits of local food systems in Iowa. Swenson recommends an increase in direct-to-consumer sales as well as sales in the retail and institutional sectors. He also stresses the need for more local food system infrastructure, research and development, and incentives.^{iv}

Local food production provides:

- opportunities for beginning farmers to start farming with lower capital investment (smaller equipment and fewer acres are needed),
- opportunities for diversified farms that improve Iowa's food security and resilience,
- new markets for existing farmers, and
- opportunities for children and adults to connect to their food sources, and to develop healthy eating habits.

Local food systems encourage job creation, economic development and stronger, healthier communities. The interest in the sales of local foods is not limited to fruit and vegetable producers. Conventional farmers who raise corn, soybeans, cattle, and hogs also may be interested in local food markets as a way to diversify their operations or help a son or daughter begin his or her own agricultural enterprise. Greenhouse and high tunnel production have the potential to expand year-round fruit and vegetable production in Iowa. Increased local food production, marketing, and processing ultimately result in more jobs. A 2010 research project examining the potential value of an increased fruit and vegetable industry in six states (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) studied the potential benefits of increasing production of 28 fruit and vegetable crops and projected increased

consumption of in-state produce. The analysis indicated that under this scenario, farm-level sales would reach about \$61.4 million, with a potential retail value of \$230.1 million and creation of a total of 657 farm-level jobs, compared to the 131 jobs currently generated from this acreage under corn and soybean production.^v

For local food systems to gain traction and momentum, food system stakeholders and players must be supported. As an institution, Iowa State University – through its Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program – can act as facilitators, conveners, and partners to support communities in their food systems goals and objectives.

As Brian Raison (2010) said: “We must continue to function as educators, but we don’t simply impart data from on high. Instead, we need to become better partners. We need to come along side and facilitate helping communities discover the knowledge and talent and expertise that exists within their group. Then, we need to help them develop it.”^{vi}

Local Food and Farm Initiative

Recognizing the increasing importance and potential benefits of developing local food systems statewide, the Iowa Legislature asked the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at ISU to develop an “actionable” plan to create a more vibrant local food economy. The Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan was developed in 2010 by gathering and assessing input from more than 1,000 Iowans. The resulting document outlined 29 operational recommendations organized into these six sections:

- Business Development and Financial Assistance
- Processing
- Food Safety
- Beginning, Minority, and Transitioning Farmers
- Assessing Progress
- Local Food Incentives

The Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan was presented to the Iowa legislature in January 2011; in July of that year, funds were approved in the state’s agriculture and natural resources budget to establish the Local Food and Farm Initiative (SF-509). The purpose of this Initiative is to “empower farmers and food entrepreneurs to provide for strong local food economies that promote self-sufficiency and job growth in the agricultural sector and allied sectors of the economy.” Because many other partners are working successfully on Processing, Food Safety, and Assessing Progress, the Local Food and Farm Initiative focused on Business Development and Financial Assistance; Beginning, Minority, and Transitioning Farmers; and Local Food Incentives. While the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan was not explicitly named in the legislation, the goals of the Initiative and the recommendations from the Plan were integrally related. This work, begun in 2011, will continue into fiscal 2017 with renewed support and funding approved during the 2016 legislative session.

Program Areas

1. Beginning Farmers

Goal: Increase the number of beginning farmers growing food for Iowa, and support for beginning farmers' assistance networks.

According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture, 18 percent of Iowa farmers are more than 65 years old, and only 4 percent are less than 35 years old. Who will farm our land in the future? Rural communities are in decline, losing schools and local jobs: only 16 percent of the total US population lives in rural areas. Young people are showing a renewed interest in small-scale diversified farms, while consumers are looking for more local food options. Local food production provides opportunities for beginning farmers to start their operations with lower capital investment, because they can begin with smaller equipment and fewer acres. However, these factors do not mean that it is easy to start a farm business. Research and programs to support beginning and aspiring farmers are critical.

Overview of 07/2015 – 06/2016

➤ **Tactic 1: Training programs**

Resource Guide for Beginning Farmers

The Resource Guide for Beginning Farmers published in July 2015 was presented at the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative Conference in October 2015 (Durham, NC), and at a USDA beginning farmer gathering in Sinsinawa Mounds (WI) in February 2016. Several farm training initiatives have reached out to the Local Foods Program to discuss the guide's application.

<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/A-Resource-Guide-for-Beginning-Farmers>

This guide was also used as a basis to develop the prison farm training program, described below.

➤ **Tactic 2: Prison farm and training program**

The ISU Landscape Architecture Program and ISU Local Foods Program worked with inmates from the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women (ICIW) in Mitchellville to design and implement production gardens on their prison campus. 2015 was a pilot year in which students from the landscape architecture program helped eight women inmates design and implement a one-acre garden and prairie plots.

In the fall of 2015, Julie Stevens (Landscape Architecture) and Alice Topaloff (Local Foods Program) received a \$75,000 Wellmark Foundation match grant that helped launch a training program. Between December 2015 and April 2016, Julie, her students, and Alice went to Mitchellville every week to meet with ICIW inmates and staff (including security officers, maintenance staff, food service staff, and administrators) to plan the gardens and design a training curriculum.

They brought resources, experts and publications on topics such as composting, planting calendars, soil health, and record-keeping, and worked with the garden crew to design materials adapted to the prison setting.

In May 2016, the garden crew tilled 3 acres of garden beds, brought in 12 dump trucks full of compost, and started planting. So far, the prison crew has harvested zucchini, yellow squash, radishes, onions, green beans, carrots, and peppers. Most of the produce goes to the institution's food service, but some goes to the local food bank. The women thought it was important for them to donate some of the produce to local food pantries.

About 10 women serve on the garden crew at any given time. Each week, a new "Garden Manager," "Record Keeper" and "Tool Queen" are appointed. They run the garden independently, with support from the Local Foods Program team and ISU landscape architecture faculty and students.

Next Steps

➤ **Tactic 1: Training programs**

Many people who are interested in small-scale, diversified farming do not come from an agricultural background. Not only does this complicate their access to material resources (land, equipment, etc.), but they also may lack basic farm knowledge and support networks. Further, many beginning and established farmers who have a background in commodity agriculture have little experience with crops and products suitable for the local marketplace. Therefore, the Local Foods Program is working to provide beginning farmers with the training and skills they need to grow and sell to local markets. Projects often involve collaboration with Practical Farmers of Iowa and their network of beginning farmers. The ISU Local Foods Program staff in northeast Iowa will be starting a beginning farmer network for their area in fall 2016.

➤ **Tactic 2: Prison farms**

So far, the program has been a huge success. Funds are being raised to build a greenhouse in the winter. The inmates will be able to develop new skills, and grow their own transplants rather than rely on donations. Another goal is to build a more systematic way to connect the women on the garden crew to the Iowa local food movement when they leave prison. Several of them are now interested in starting their own farming operation; others would like to use the skills they've learned in future jobs.

➤ **Tactic 3: Outreach to ISU students**

Most student associations related to beginning farmers at Iowa State University focus on conventional farming. The team's goal is to increase the awareness of ISU students of the benefits (economic, environmental, sociological) of alternative agriculture enterprises. This will be done through strategic outreach as well as hiring interns from different backgrounds to work with the Local Foods Program.

2. Economic Development

Goal: Assist individuals, businesses, and organizations to make informed decisions about developing sustainable food businesses, through technical assistance and educational programs.

In January 2015, the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the US Department of Agriculture released a report providing an overview and analysis of the growth, changes, and challenges to local and regional food systems.ⁱ Researchers observed that after a decade of rapid growth in the local food economy:

1. Consumer interest in farmers markets and CSAs may have reached a plateau.
2. The local food economy is maturing, and other markets for local food are expanding rapidly. This would include larger-volume mainstream markets such as grocery stores, institutions such as schools and hospitals, and food hubs.

The growth in local food wholesale volume can be observed both nationally and in Iowa. For example, according to the USDA, the number of school districts with farm-to-school programs that use local foods increased 430 percent from 2006 to 2012.^{vii} In Iowa, a 2014 report by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at ISU^{viii} showed that grocery stores sales accounted for 68 percent of tracked local food sales statewide in 2013.

Selling more local food to wholesale purchasers requires special kinds of supply chain businesses that are equipped to deal with small farmers. In some cases, aggregation and distribution businesses called *food hubs* are providing the product to these institutional markets. The ERS reported that since 2006, the number of food hubs has increased by 288 percent, to 302 outlets throughout the country.^{iv} A February 2015 study of food hubs conducted by the ISU Local Foods Program evaluation team surveyed Iowa local food leaders, and identified 31 new and emerging food hubs or centers of food hub-related activity in Iowa.^{ix} New processing businesses also have emerged to service small farm production.

Overview of 07/2015 – 06/2016

➤ **Tactic 1: Farmer profitability**

Market development and logistics for local food distribution in the Cedar Valley (*grant project M2014-06, funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture's Marketing and Food Systems Initiative*)

Getting local food into the hands of consumers requires a variety of creative approaches. This project in northern Iowa demonstrated several ways to encourage marketing and sales of local food in the area. This project explored the question: Is a CSA worksite program beneficial to increasing local food consumption? CSA worksite members were surveyed, and indicated that many had never participated in a CSA/food box program before, showing that this process exposed a new customer base to locally sourced food.

Impact of spotted-wing drosophila on fruit production in Iowa

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach received a USDA Federal State Marketing Improvement Program grant to help fruit growers manage their risk in the face of a new pest: spotted-wing drosophila (SWD). This pest damages small soft fruits, such as strawberries, raspberries, and aronia berries,

potentially causing significant financial loss within these high-value crops. ISU's Local Foods Program staff partnered on the project as evaluators.

The survey included 10 farmers participating in on-farm monitoring of the pest. Three, all aronia berry producers, reported experiencing SWD damage in fruit on their farms in 2015. They estimated that 3,500 total pounds of fruit were damaged, with an estimated total value of \$4,000. To put this in perspective, these three farmers valued their entire crop at \$11,500. Thus, the damaged fruit was valued at over one-third (35 percent) of the value of their entire crop, demonstrating how devastating a SWD infestation can be.

Iowa CSA farms: 2016 Statewide List of CSA Farms and Organizers Serving Iowa

Community Support Agriculture (CSA) operations are partnerships between farmers and community members who want to buy high-quality, fresh, local produce on a regular basis. CSA farmers produce fresh vegetables, fruits, meats, fiber, or related products, for direct sale to local community members. The buyers become shareholders by paying the farmer in advance for a CSA share, and receive regular deliveries of products from the farmer throughout the growing season. This way, the farmer has up-front capital to start the season, and customers share the risks—and benefits—of production with the farmer. In 2016, the LFFI continued to promote CSA farms by publishing *Iowa CSA Farms: 2016 Statewide List of CSA Farms and Organizers Serving Iowa*. The newly updated directory lists 79 CSA farmers who are offering fresh produce and other products for local consumers. Release of this popular directory each spring is accompanied by a statewide press release, encouraging Iowa consumers to purchase from a CSA in their area.

<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Iowa-CSA-Farms-2016-Statewide-List-of-Iowa-CSA-Farms-and-Organizers>

➤ Tactic 2: Food hubs

According to USDA, a food hub is “a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution and marketing of source-identified food products, primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.” The Local Food Program’s goals are to increase the following metrics for Iowa:

1. Total dollars of food hub sales revenue,
2. Number of farmers’ accessing markets through food hubs, and
3. Diversity of producers selling to food hubs (including gender, age, and race).

During June 2015 – June 2016, the ISU Local Foods Program:

- Launched and funded the Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group, a new peer learning community for food hub managers. The team facilitated quarterly day-long meetings featuring food hub tours, presentations, and group discussions on shared challenges.
- Helped secure a \$30,000 North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Development (NCR-SARE) Partnership Grant to create a shared inventory tracking system for food hubs that are transporting one another’s products. The system has now been developed by Dr. Caroline Krejci’s

lab at the ISU Department of Industrial, Manufacturing and Systems Engineering, and piloted by four Iowa food hubs.

- Secured \$2,000 from the SARE PDP mini-grant program so that a cohort of 8 Iowa food hub managers could attend the National Food Hub Conference.
- Developed an award-winning extension program (including a printed guide and Excel tool) on food hub financial metrics and delivered it at the National Food Hub Conference in March 2016.
- Provided evaluation for the National Good Food Network's food hub support program.
- Provided individualized financial, strategic, and recordkeeping assistance to 9 Iowa food hubs.

The Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group has become a model for other states. ISU was asked to present its work at the National Food Hub Conference and on a webinar hosted by the Michigan Food Hub Network. Food hubs elsewhere have asked to use the inventory-sharing tool once it is developed.

Wallace Center food hub program evaluation

The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program worked with the Wallace Center at Winrock International to evaluate its *Strengthening Small Scale Sustainable Farming and Food Systems by Accelerating Food Hub Development* program. The Wallace Center is a recognized national leader in food hub development, research, and education. The comprehensive program built the capacity of food hubs and their supporters through re-granting, educational programs, and technical assistance. The program included:

- **Three re-granting and technical assistance programs for food hubs.** Nearly \$1.2 million was re-granted through this program. A total of 39 unique food hubs and 3 organizations providing technical assistance participated directly or indirectly in at least one of the three re-granting programs.
- **Ten Early Food Hub Development Workshops held in locations around the nation.** A total of 304 individuals participated in the workshops.
- **National Good Food Network webinars.** Nearly 2,000 unique individuals have participated in these monthly webinars since 2014.
- **The National Food Hub Collaboration.** Today this collaborative includes eight organizations working on a national level to support food hubs.
- **Providing scholarships to the University of Vermont's new Food Hub Management Professional Certificate program.** The Wallace Center gave scholarships to 12 individuals to take part in the program.

The evaluation project was conducted over an 18-month period and included 7 evaluation methods and 1,022 respondents. Results will be made public in a few months. Partnering on this project gave the ISU Local Foods Program a chance to make connections with food hubs around the nation, and strengthened the Local Foods Program's partnership with national leaders in local and regional food systems development.

Relevant publications produced by the Local Foods Program during this period include *Managing Cash Flow for a Low Capital Food Hub Startup* (June 2015), *Using Accounting Software for Food Hubs*:

Processing Traceable Orders (October 2015), a three-part *Local Food Organizational Toolkit* (October 2015), and *The Managers Guide to Food Hub Finances* (expected release September 2016). All are available for free download in the Local Foods section of the ISU Extension Store, which can be accessed at <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Topic/Food-Nutrition-and-Health/Local-Foods>.

Next Steps

➤ **Tactic 1: Farmer profitability**

The Local Food Program's goals are to increase the number of diversified and value-added farmers who use benchmarks to assess their farms, and promote increased profitability of these farms. The team will do this by providing opportunities to increase financial literacy, collaborating with other organizations for workshops, presentations, one-on-one consulting, and business planning.

➤ **Tactic 2: Food hubs**

Evaluators will continue to support the Iowa Food Hub Managers Working Group in addressing participants' needs. The focus will be on improving the efficiency and sustainability of Iowa food hubs so they can better serve producers. ISU will also offer training for producers who supply to food hubs. In particular, the team will help hubs collaborate more effectively with farmers on marketing, food safety, and postharvest handling.

➤ **Tactic 3: Food entrepreneurs**

To increase the number of food system jobs in the state, ISU will assist the growing number of businesses supporting food entrepreneurs: public markets, shared-use kitchens, cooperative model urban farms, farmers markets, food entrepreneur centers, and many other creative areas of business development. The goal is also to assist in increasing the percentage of local food enterprises that are breaking even or earning positive net income. This will be achieved through locally based projects, some falling under the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit program (see Tactic 2 under Community Development, below), and others that connect start-up entrepreneurs and organizations to appropriate resources and contacts.

Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit projects that are implemented or underway include: a public market project in downtown Des Moines, currently in the design and assessment phase; a Leopold Center proposal for a North Iowa Fresh partnership with Opportunity Village in Clear Lake to create a food hub and distribution business; a creative program development for farmers' markets working in partnership with producers, managers, and customers to offer unique and well-attended markets in rural and urban communities in northern Iowa; and a collaborative farm at Sinsinawa Mound in southwest Wisconsin, in the design phase to offer a place for minority and under-privileged producers to have access to land and to provide mentorship for beginning farming. (This project is a collaboration that includes both Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and University of Wisconsin Extension.)

➤ **Tactic 4: Farm to institution**

Institutions such as schools, colleges, care facilities, and hospitals play an increasingly important role in the local food marketing system. Encouraging these venues to buy locally, and providing the resources

and technical assistance they need to do so, are critical to addressing issues such as fair food access. Through the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit process, one of Dubuque's priority projects will be to help institutional purchasers understand the impact they could have if they purchased more of their food from local farmers. The project will also assist in building networks and relationships among producers and buyers.

➤ **Tactic 5: Farm laborers**

Farm laborers often are left out of the conversation when talking about local food system development. The staff's goal is to encourage payment of livable wages for farm employees. The increased volume of local food sales also should increase the diversity of farmers, farm size and structure, the number of acres used for human food production, and the number of small farms and gardens. Members of the Local Foods Program team have participated in quarterly Migrant and Seasonal Farm Labor Program meetings convened by ISU Extension and Outreach Community Development, and are strategically reaching out to organizations including Iowa Workforce Development, Proteus, and Foodworkers Alliance.

3. Community Development

Goal: Raise the awareness of local food systems opportunities and build capacity for food systems professionals, organizations, and projects.

"Collaboration is the name of the game when you really want to get things moving on a large scale with an important initiative," (O'Neill and Zdorovstov*) such as local food systems. Local food systems are thriving across Iowa, helping to enhance its communities' economies, people, and ecosystems. A variety of participants are facilitating food system change, including producers, farm laborers, nonprofits and their employees and volunteers, community activists, ISU Extension and Outreach staff, and more. Bringing the right players to the table and then gaining consensus on moving forward does not happen overnight. Collective impact typically requires five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations (www.collectiveimpactforum.org).

As outputs are developed, Iowa communities and individuals will become better equipped with the tools, lessons learned, and best practices critical to successful, equitable, and sustainable local food system development.

Overview of 07/2015 – 06/2016

➤ **Tactic 1: Coalition-building**

Regional Food Systems Working Group

Established in 2003, the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) is a statewide network for Iowans working to build a more resilient regional food system. RFSWG is comprised of 13 geographically based groups covering 75 Iowa counties. Each group works with different stakeholders — farmers, food-

based businesses, non-profits, Extension and Outreach, Resource Conservation and Development groups, educational institutions, and government agencies — to support local food systems development in their region. RFSWG is funded in part by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

After reviewing results from a survey given to local food leaders and their supervisors in 2015, RFSWG brought them together in February 2016 for a day-long event to determine what was working, what challenges were being faced, and how the Local Foods Program could help address challenges and missing resources. Many topics were suggested for professional development and onboarding processes for community local food coordinators (LFCs). In addition, the Local Foods Program thought there might be value in creating a peer network to whom we offer monthly webinars, providing information and building a sense of trust and camaraderie. RFSWG is also building a mentoring program, to pair an experienced local food coordinator with a new one for guidance and support. The team introduced both ideas at a daylong information-gathering event, and many in attendance were interested in participating in one or both of those programs. RFSWG is valued because it helps develop valuable networks by providing a venue and opportunity to build peer relationships, and it allows local food practitioners to share wisdom with one another.

In addition, the RFSWG steering committee decided to change its configuration to include local food coordinators, three representative members from partner organizations and a person who could provide information on policy issues. It is organized as follows: one new LFC, two experienced LFCs, one member from ISU SNAP-Ed, one member from the Iowa Department of Education, one member from the Iowa Healthiest State Initiative, and one member who will serve as the policy point person. All members of the steering committee have agreed to attend 75 percent of monthly committee meetings, and at least three of the group's four quarterly meetings/field days.

Coalition-building and strategic planning

Although demand for local food is growing, many hurdles remain relative to capacity development, long-term financial sustainability for local food leaders and systems coordinators, infrastructure for the formation of collaborative partnerships to address needed systemic changes, and support to collect, analyze, and report on local foods projects and programs.

Across Iowa, coalitions are beginning to develop through many different platforms, typically guided by a local food leader. These local leaders have requested assistance to initiate the conversations that would lead to the formation of a coalition to meet on a regular basis and determine priority projects to develop together. This work focuses on the development of trusting relationships, research and understanding of the existing conditions of a community, and offering multiple ways for additional community members to be included in the discussions.

The reason trusted relationships play such a vital role is because the problems being addressed by these groups are dealing with complex, system-wide issues. The groups are addressing systemic problems such as childhood hunger, community revitalization, or increasing markets for producers and educating consumers about the true cost of food.

After steering committees are formed, they identify projects and programs to move toward their systemic goals. Short-, medium-, and long-term projects and programs are identified, with measureable indicators. (See Ag Urbanism Toolkit, below.)

➤ **Tactic 2: Ag Urbanism Toolkit**

The *Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit* is a three-year program that guides communities through development and implementation of local food system projects. The Toolkit program started in the Community Design Lab at Iowa State University with a grant from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and is wrapping up its third year of funding. Now, the Local Foods Program partners with the Iowa State Community Design Lab, and the ISU Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development and Agriculture and Natural Resources programs. The program also relies on expertise from community business owners and other local leaders for project development.

Additionally, ISU is starting to build relationships with national partners who are making use of the online resources, including other universities that are interested in the process. Toolkit staff partner with communities of all shapes and sizes. Current partners include Des Moines and Cedar Rapids, who are wrapping up their last year of project implementation; Cass County, Dubuque, and Healthy Harvest of North Iowa, who are entering in to the second year of project definition and design; and Pleasant Hill, where the coalition is just starting its development phase.

The first year involves coalition development, building trust, research of existing conditions, and decision-making on priority projects for food systems (the team has researched more than 20 different tactics of agricultural sectors related to production, transformation, distribution, consumption, and resource management). The process helps communities determine which tactics would best assist in developing their goals around food system development.

Outputs from the first year include: generation of a community food system coalition with mission, vision, core values, and operating principles; a community food system and health assessment and snapshot; community public input sessions; and prioritization of four or five projects for the community to implement in years two and three.

In the second two years, the team continues to meet quarterly with the coalition, but priority projects are taken up by working groups that convene monthly for accountability and ensured success for implementation.

The goal is to complete four or five projects per community. They typically include one or two quick-win projects, an intermediate, and a long-term economic development project. Outcomes and outputs from the second and third years include design work or design build projects, grant-writing assistance, facilitation of all meetings, and additional technical assistance from ISU faculty and staff.

The first edition of the *Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit* guide is now available online at the Extension Store: <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Agricultural-Urbanism-Toolkit>

➤ **Tactic 3: Building capacity for local food organizations/communities**

The Local Foods Program team continues to offer a holistic support network for local food coordinators and their supervisors that includes peer-to-peer learning groups, workshops, mentoring opportunities, resources, and one-on-one technical assistance.

Local Food Leader training

The Local Foods Program launched a local food leader training project in 2015, with nearly 100 people participating. A meeting was convened and facilitated by the Local Foods Program team for individuals interested in enhancing their food systems work in a leadership role within their community. Experts spoke on a variety of different topics, including local food systems, collective impact, leadership development, building trust, and having a healthy work-life balance. The training also included opportunities to discuss ways to incorporate these practices into local food leaders' daily work as individuals and in coalitions.

Research and publications

In October 2015, the Local Foods Program team published the three-part *Iowa Local Food Organizational Toolkit: Structure, Management and Finance Series*.

- Part 1: “Defining your organization’s focus and leadership”
- Part 2: “Organizational structure”
- Part 3: “Funding your local food organization”

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/local-food-organizational-toolkit>

The Local Foods Program team also investigated enabling environments for the development of local food systems, to assess key food systems participants' access to and utilization of various community relationships and resources, and how this affects the ultimate successes within a given food system. As a result of this research, the team can begin to identify how various contextual variables within a community lead to a food system characterized by fairness, equity, and inclusion. The resulting publication, *Determining Factors for Local Food System Success*, will be available in fall 2016.

➤ **Tactic 4: Farm-to-school**

FoodCorps Iowa

During the 2015-16 school year, 11 FoodCorps Iowa service members and their supervisors worked directly with students in 8 Iowa communities, teaching Pick a Better Snack, creating or bettering school gardens, and initiating an after-school local food entrepreneur club. Because of the increasing importance of Iowa's program to the FoodCorps' national office and the Local Foods Program team, long-term sustainability is emerging as an important objective for their work. This goal is being advanced with the help of the service site supervisors, who are helping service members support teams of community members who will continue the programs being built in their schools/school systems.

➤ **Tactic 5: Food access**

While focusing mainly on Iowa and surrounding regions, the team is engaged in research into food insecurity and food access issues across the country. Included in this research are ways in which the

federal government is involved, but also highlighting grassroots initiatives that aim to ensure farmer profitability as well as increased food access.

➤ **Tactic 6: Awareness and outreach**

A Local Foods Program website was launched in 2015 at www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods, highlighting the rationale for ISU's investment in local food systems development, the mission and goals of the team, and a wealth of resources and toolkits for local food systems practitioners. The site also offers a blog with weekly updates of interest to the Local Foods Program's clients, and an RSS feed for subscribers. The site garnered more than 15,000 page views in fiscal 2016. The team also launched a Facebook page, currently at 300 followers. Publications are continually being developed and made available through the ISU Extension Store, most at no cost to clients. More than 1,300 copies of these publications have been downloaded to date.

Next Steps

➤ **Tactic 1: Coalition-building**

Within the next year, the Regional Food Systems Working Group will complete a strategic plan. This should provide several benefits: more targeted individual meetings, more widely shared resources, mutual goal-setting, broader data for evaluation projects, and more opportunities for professional development and networking with a broader and larger audience.

➤ **Tactic 2: Ag Urbanism Toolkit**

In the spring of 2016, the team launched a survey to create a new name for the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit. The new name, *Community Food Systems*, will be launched in the fall of 2016, along with a menu of services that are offered through the program. This menu will still include the three-year program that has been developed, but it will also include *a la carte* services available to communities, such as coalition development, community readiness, food and health systems assessment, or project design. Depending on the type of project they are interested in, communities will have to fill out a request and application proving that the project is ready and has built a strong base of community participation.

In addition to the new name and menu of services, the team will also begin offering a consultation program to communities in other states. ISU will also be able to offer this training to others, especially to community leaders who would like to lead the process in communities in which they work.

An annual conference will continue to be held in December to offer new communities, interested residents, and other states an opportunity to learn about the tools and processes used through the Agricultural Urbanism Toolkit, as well as for communities to learn and discover together best management practices around the state.

➤ **Tactic 3: Building capacity for local foods organizations and communities.**

Supporting local food system development

The RFSWG steering committee will complete a strategic plan that will help local food leaders across the state create coalitions that will include equity, partnership development, policy and professional development. This will be done collaboratively with communities employing the Ag Urbanism Toolkit.

Supporting local food coordinators

RFSWG will provide the annual Local Food Leader training, which will include topics like: An Introduction to Food Systems; Strategic Planning; Plans of Work; Work-Life Balance; Communication Skills (including building trust); Facilitation; and Event Planning.

Peer-to-peer calls

On a monthly basis, RFSWG will provide administrative support, including speakers when not available from within the cohort, for local food leaders to discuss best practices and ways to address challenges.

Mentor program

RFSWG will be launching a pilot project that will connect experienced local food coordinators with one or two new ones for mentoring.

➤ **Tactic 4: Farm to school**

Heading into ISU's second year as the host site supervisors for FoodCorps Iowa, the team plans to increase the number of service sites and service members in 2017.

➤ **Tactic 5: Food access**

The team's research will continue to examine food insecurity and food access issues in Iowa and across the country. Included in this research is an examination of how community members and organizations collaborate together, as well as connect with emergency food organizations and recipients, to address food security at a local scale. Staff look forward to working on a project that fosters such collaborations to increase locally grown fruits and vegetables available at food pantries and other food access locations to people experiencing poverty and food insecurity.

➤ **Tactic 6: Awareness and outreach**

In fiscal 2017, the Local Foods Program will develop a comprehensive outreach plan to direct its efforts. The plan will include website management, blog development, social media, news releases, publications, and internal communications strategies. The goal will be to increase awareness throughout the state about the expertise, toolkits and resources, networking opportunities, and coalition-building services offered by the team, to strengthen local foods development in Iowa.

4. Evaluation

Goal: Systematically gather information (data) on the context, processes, and outcomes of local food system work to inform the decisions and actions of partners to effectively support and evaluate their own work and the food systems work of others.

Iowa's Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) tracked local food purchases by institutions, retail stores, and restaurants for three years (2012 – 2014). Their data show that institutional and intermediated markets such as grocery stores and restaurants are eclipsing direct-to-consumer local food sales and creating jobs.^{viii}

Overview of 07/2015 – 06/2016

➤ **Tactic 1: Building capacity for partners to evaluate their projects**

After regularly presenting at conferences in meetings, Local Foods Program evaluators decided to focus on developing tools and resources for practitioners to do evaluation work for themselves.

Tools to Evaluate Your Coalition: Strong coalitions and partnerships are essential to the success of an organization. This series of four publications introduces the importance of coalitions and how evaluating those partnerships can be helpful. The series looks at how to develop coalitions, what to do when coalitions have been established, and how to evaluate a mature coalition. Each publication includes questions to ask to evaluate the health of the partnership at each stage of the relationship.

<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Tools-to-Evaluate-Your-Coalition>

Next Steps

➤ **Tactic 1: Building capacity for partners to evaluate their projects**

In addition to conducting evaluations, the Local Foods Program evaluation team works with partners to increase their own capacity to evaluate their work. Staff are currently developing a database of evaluation survey questions; the database is currently in beta-testing, and will be available for use by partners in September 2016.

The Local Foods Program also will be releasing a bibliography of resources for systems evaluation in the fall of 2016.

➤ **Tactic 2: Local foods systems impact in Iowa**

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach has been collaborating with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, National Agriculture Statistics Service, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Farmers Market Association, and the Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association since 2014 to develop and administer a survey of horticultural and specialty crop producers. The survey asks about the volume and value of production sold in 2015, as well as marketing channels and production methods used. Data collection was completed in June 2016,

and the Local Foods Program evaluation team is currently analyzing the data. A final report will be released publicly in winter 2016-17.

This data will reveal any change in local food production among horticulture and specialty crop producers over time, as well as information on production for non-local markets.

5. Local Foods Publications Released between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016

CSA Farms: 2016 Statewide List of Iowa CSA Farms and Organizers (LF0012), March 2016.

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Iowa-CSA-Farms-2016-Statewide-List-of-Iowa-CSA-Farms-and-Organizers>

Tools to Evaluate Your Coalition (LF0010), February 2016.

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Tools-to-Evaluate-Your-Coalition>

Using Accounting Software for Food Hubs: Processing Traceable Orders, October 2015.

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Using-Accounting-Software-for-Food-Hubs-Processing-Traceable-Orders>

Local Food Organizational Toolkit (3 parts), October 2015.

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Local-Food-Organizational-Toolkit-Part-1-Defining-your-organizations-focus-and-leadership>

Agriculture Urbanism Toolkit, July 2015.

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Agricultural-Urbanism-Toolkit>

Resource Guide for Beginning Farmers, July 2015.

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/A-Resource-Guide-for-Beginning-Farmers>

Program Team

Craig Chase – Local Food and Farm Initiative state coordinator

Chase, in addition to being the state coordinator, is currently the program manager of the Local Foods Program at ISU Extension and Outreach and the program manager of the Marketing and Food Systems Initiative for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Lynn Heuss – Local Food and Farm Initiative assistant state coordinator

Heuss is the Local Food and Farm Program assistant coordinator, and a program coordinator for Women, Food and Agriculture Network.

Leigh Adcock – Local Foods Program communications specialist

Adcock joined the team in March 2016. She maintains the team's blog, website, and Facebook page, and co-writes, edits, and formats its publications and reports. She is also communications and conference coordinator for Women, Food and Agriculture Network.

Corry Bregendahl and Arlene Enderton – Local Food and Farm initiative evaluation team

Bregendahl is an associate scientist at the Leopold Center where she leads evaluation of local and regional food system initiatives and projects, Center-funded programs, and externally funded food- and agriculture-related efforts. She co-authored the Iowa Food and Farm plan and currently is leading evaluation for the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, the Regional Food Systems Working Group and the Iowa Food System Working Group. She left the team in June 2016 to spend more time with her family.

Enderton joined the Leopold Center as a program assistant in 2013. She assists in evaluation efforts by conducting interviews, creating surveys, analyzing data and writing reports. She is involved in evaluation of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, the Regional Food Systems Working Group, the Iowa Food System Working Group, Leopold Center grant programs, and the Wallace Center.

Carrie Chennault – graduate research assistant

Chennault's research interests include the intersection of sustainable agriculture, food, and critical geography. She focuses on understanding how to make local food systems more socially just, open, and process-based, with an emphasis on food access and community engagement. She is pursuing a PhD in sustainable agriculture at ISU.

Kayla Koether – extension food systems specialist

Koether is a food systems specialist for ISU Extension and Outreach in six counties in northeast Iowa. She has a partial appointment with the Extension Local Foods Program and specializes in beginning farmer education and outreach.

Ahna Kruzic – graduate research assistant

Kruzic's research interests include the intersections of sustainable agriculture, food, and rural sociology, and identifying variables to success for enabling communities' development of local food systems. Ahna left the team to accept a job in California in the summer of 2016, after graduating from ISU with her master's degree in sustainable agriculture and rural sociology.

Courtney Long – Design Fellow

Long is a Design Fellow with the ISU Community Design Lab and ISU Extension and Outreach's Local Foods Program. Her project involvement includes integrating local and regional food systems, community health and wellness, and sustainable infrastructure into community design.

Savanna Lyons – graduate research assistant

Lyons' research focuses on best practices in aggregation and distribution of local foods, with an emphasis on food hub financial management and coordinated production planning among farmer groups.

Caitlin Szymanski – program coordinator, Local Foods Program

Szymanski joined the team in April 2016. Her work primarily focuses on supporting and connecting the growing number of local food coordinators and other county-based extension employees around Iowa whose work intersects with the local food system.

Alice Topaloff – program assistant, Local Foods Program

Topaloff participates in projects on value-added strategies, beginning farmers, the prison gardening program, and communication and outreach. She also assists the evaluation team.

Teresa Wiemerslage – extension food systems coordinator

Wiemerslage is a Regional Program Coordinator for Food Systems for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach in six counties in northeast Iowa. She coordinates the work of the Northeast Iowa Food & Farm Coalition (NIFF) and currently serves as the ISU Extension liaison for the NE Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative. Teresa has a partial appointment with the Extension Local Foods Program so she can share her expertise in food system development, food hubs, on-farm food safety and Group GAP, and Farm to School.

Program Council

A local food and farm program council was established by the LFFI's legislation to "advise the local food and farm program coordinator carrying out the purpose and goals of the [Initiative]." The council consists of six members representing different partners within Iowa's local food system. The Council began meeting in January 2012, and includes:

- **Maury Wills**, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
- **Tony Thompson**, Iowa Farmers Union
- **Warren Johnson**, Iowa League of RC&Ds of the Natural Resources Conservation Service
- **Teresa Wiemerslage**, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the Northeast Iowa Food and Farm Coalition
- **Barb Ristau**, Iowa Farmers Market Association
- **Marcy Billings**, Loffredo Fresh Produce

The Council is taking a more prominent role in advising how to specifically move forward with the Program and encourage further development of the Iowa local food system in general.

References

- ⁱ Low, S. et al (2015). Trends in U.S. Local and Regional Food Systems, Report to Congress. *USDA Economic Research Service*. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1763057/ap068.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ Enderton, A. and Corry Bregendahl (2014). 2013 Economic Impacts of Iowa's Regional Food Systems Working Group. *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2014-11-2013-economic-impacts-iowas-regional-food-systems-working-group>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Swenson, D. (2011). "Exploring Small-Scale Meat Processing Expansions in Iowa." *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2011-04-exploring-small-scale-meat-processing-expansions-iowa.pdf>
- ^{iv} Swenson, D. (2011). "Measuring the Economic Impact of Fruit and Vegetable Production in Southwest Iowa Considering Metropolitan Demand." *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2011-04-measuring-economic-impacts-increased-fresh-fruit-and-vegetable-production-iowa-considering-metropoli.pdf>
- ^v Swenson, D. (2010). "Selected Measures of the Economic Values of Increased Fruit and Vegetable Production and Consumption in the Upper Midwest." *Department of Economics, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2010-03-selected-measures-economic-values-increased-fruit-and-vegetable-production-and-consumption-upper-mid.pdf>
- ^{vi} Raison, B. (2010). Educators or Facilitators, Clarifying Extension's Role in the Emerging Local Food Systems Movement. *Journal of Extension*, Vol. 48, No 3. <http://www.joe.org/joe/2010june/comm1.php>
- ^{vii} U.S. Department of Agriculture (2013). *Farm to School Census*. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/census#/>
- ^{viii} Enderton, A. and Corry Bregendahl (2014). Economic Impacts of the Regional Food Systems Working Group of Iowa. *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/marketing/economic-impacts-local-food-iowa>
- ^{ix} Enderton, A. and Corry Bregendahl (2015). Food Hub Development in Iowa. *Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University*. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2015-02-food-hub-development-iowa>
- ^x O'Neill, K. and Chris Zdorovtsov (June 2014). Using Collective Impact to Build a Local Foods System. *South Dakota State University Extension Community Development*. <http://www.extension.org/pages/70627/using-collective-impact-to-build-a-local-foods-system#.VcONuvlv6b0>